**About The Crucible- context information**

* [The Crucible](http://www.gradesaver.com/the-crucible/) is a fictional retelling of events in American history surrounding the Salem Witch Trials of the seventeenth century.
* Yet, is as much a product of the time in which [Arthur Miller](http://www.gradesaver.com/author/arthur-miller/) wrote it - the early 1950s - as it is description of Puritan society. The Salem witch trials took place from June through September of 1692, during which time nineteen men and women were hanged at Gallows Hill near Salem.
* Hundreds of other persons faced accusations of witchcraft and dozens more languished in jail without trials. As the play describes, the witchcraft trials began because of the illness of [Betty Parris](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=14909), the daughter of the Salem minister, [Reverend Samuel Parris](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=14900), a former merchant in Barbados. However, actual events diverge from the narrative of the play. The Parris' slave, [Tituba](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=14904) immediately came under suspicion. Although most of the women first accused of witchcraft were considered disreputable, several reputable members of the community were soon executed, including [Rebecca Nurse](http://www.gradesaver.com/character.html?character=14906) (featured in the play), and in the most controversial execution, George Burroughs, the former minister in Salem.
* One of the most flamboyant of the women executed was Bridget Bishop, a woman who had been married several times and was known as the mistress of two Salem taverns and had a reputation for dressing more 'artistically' than the women of the village.
* Sir William Phips, the Governor of Massachusetts, created a new court to oversee the witchcraft cases. The Chief Justice of this court was William Stoughton, an avid witch-hunter who permitted many questionable deviations from normal courtroom procedure including the admission of spectral evidence (testimony by afflicted persons that they had been visited by a suspect's specter) and private conversations between accusers and judges.
* By the early autumn of 1692, the cries of witchcraft began to ebb and doubts began to develop concerning the validity of the charges. Soon, the educated elite of the colony began efforts to end the witch-hunting hysteria that had enveloped Salem. Increase Mather, the father of Cotton, published "Cases of Conscience," which argued that it "were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person should be condemned." Mather urged the court to exclude spectral evidence.
* A period of atonement soon occurred in which Samuel Sewall, one of the judges, issued a public confession of guilt and apology, and Reverend Parris admitted errors in judgment. He did, however, attempt to shift the blame to others. (Governor Phips, for instance, shifted the blame to Stoughton, who nevertheless became the next Governor of Massachusetts.)
* However, **Miller wrote The Crucible not simply as a straight historical play detailing the Salem witch trials**
* Rather, the play has as much significance as a product of the early Cold War era during which Miller wrote the play. Indeed, **the play is a parable for the McCarthy era, in which similar 'witch hunts' occurred targeting citizens as communists rather than disciples of Satan.**

**McCarthy**

* Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy was an undistinguished member of the Senate until February 1950, when he made the public charge that 205 Communists had infiltrated the State department. Upon subsequent testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, McCarthy proved unable to produce the name of any "card-carrying" communists, but he gained increasing popular support for his campaign of accusations. Although he was later denounced, he promoted unfounded accusations and suspicions of communism in many quarters, and is best known for his investigation of communists in the United States Army.
* The House Committee on Un-American Activities (generally known as HUAC) also investigated communism within Hollywood, calling a number of playwrights, directors and actors known for left-wing views to testify. Although some of these, including film director Elia Kazan, testified for the committee to avoid prison sentences, the Hollywood Ten, a group of entertainers, refused to testify and were convicted of contempt and sentenced to up to one year in prison. Over three hundred other entertainers were placed on a blacklist for possible communist views and were thus forbidden to work for major Hollywood studios. Arthur Miller was one of these blacklisted. The blacklist prevented these men from receiving screen credit during this time.